



EFL Supporter Engagement Meeting

Friday 19 May 2017, 30 Gloucester Place

Attendees

EFL: Shaun Harvey (Chief Executive), John Nagle (Head of Policy), Mark Rowan (Communications Director), Andy Pomfret (Supporter Services Manager) & Nick Roberts (Public Affairs Manager)

FSF: Kevin Miles (Chief Executive) & Michael Brunskill (Director of Communications)

SD: Ashley Brown (Chief Executive) & Deborah Dilworth (Network Manager)

Championship: Di Cunningham (Norwich City); Billy Grant (Brentford); Roger Titford (Reading)

League One: Tim Hillyer (AFC Wimbledon); Roger Ellis (Coventry City); Ally Simcock (Port Vale)

League Two: Robbie Jackson (Blackpool); Dave Matthew-Jones (Cambridge United); Martin O'Hara (Doncaster Rovers)

Agenda

1. Matters arising out of the notes of the previous meeting (not covered elsewhere on the agenda)
2. Checkatrade Trophy
3. Club Relations
4. Judgement Day 3
5. Supporter Engagement
6. EFL AGM Proposals
7. Away Fans
8. Safe Standing
9. AOB

Minutes

1 - Matters Arising

EFL Websites and iFollow – John Nagle (JN) provided an update on the EFL's new website network and iFollow overseas streaming platform being launched in four tranches and will be fully operational by the end of June in time for the new season

iFollow is an exciting new commercial development for the League which will offer overseas streaming facility of live matches to fans overseas.



Whole Game Solution – The proposals have now been withdrawn though the EFL stated it would be willing to return to negotiations should relevant parties wish to re-engage in this area at a future point if it is felt to be in the best interests of EFL clubs,

Inclusion & LGBT Event – Di Cunningham (DC) informed the group about a forthcoming LGBT fan conference scheduled for 24 June. EFL confirmed details would be circulated to SLOs

2 – Checktrade Trophy

Mark Rowan (MR) presented on developments in the Checktrade Trophy outlining the key stats of the 2016/17 pilot, competition review by clubs, competition proposals and club vote, plus the format changes for the next two seasons agreed by clubs.

Voting – Shaun Harvey (SH) confirmed in discussions that 42 clubs voted on changes while six did not vote.

MR outlined that the new prize fund for the competition had increased to a total of £3 million.

Format changes were discussed with EFL clubs and various changes made, including in regard to full strength team criteria for EFL clubs giving them greater flexibility with the squads they use.

Ally Simcock (AS) questioned whether inclusion of derbies may help to develop interest in the competition, Ashley Brown (AB) questioned whether the same clubs would end up playing each other every year and Robbie Jackson (RB) stated that the competition is moving away from what he considered was its traditional competition role

Responding, SH confirmed fixtures with potential for disorder would not be considered to ensure that matches did not incur significant policing costs. Considering regionalisation of the competition more generally, SH responded to AB that while there might be some repetition of fixtures in future seasons this was the inevitable consequence of seeking to keep matches more local. Nevertheless the EFL is content that there will be enough flexibility to change groups each year to some degree. For example, there will be five new EFL clubs in the competition each season from various parts of the country.

SH stated that the EFL would continue to review the competition over the next two years. Ultimately there have been a range of innovations to meet a range of objections introduced in an attempt to reinvigorate a competition that was losing relevance doing so would provide competitive first team football for the generation of young players coming through the game's youth development programme and deliver hugely enhance financial rewards for League One and Two clubs from this competition.

Tim Hillyer (TH) stated that he appreciated the explanation about changes but questioned why bans and discipline in the competition were viewed in isolation. SH responded to say that yellow and red cards had to be dealt with this way so that clubs did not deliberately collect yellow cards in other competitions in an attempt to let bans elapse in the Checktrade Trophy.

Roger Ellis (RE) of Coventry City stated that while the Final this year had been a great day, the 43,000 attendance was not an endorsement of competition changes which is still devalued by Academy involvement. He conceded that club led changes would help. The EFL noted the points and are hopeful that fans would recognise the club led changes and give the competition more backing in its second year.



Further discussion centred on ticket pricing and experimentation of law variations in the competition.

SH reiterated that the competition was not about getting B teams in to league competition and that there was no appetite amongst league clubs for such a step.

Kevin Miles of the FSF (KM) asked if there were metrics about how many clubs consulted fans before the format vote. SH stated that he was aware a number of clubs did consult fans through various forums. SH also confirmed that the EFL knew how each clubs voted but that data would not be published.

3 – Club Relations

FSF proposed that in light of ongoing public discordance toward a small number of club owners that there could be an opportunity to set up a ‘think tank’ to review the issues.

KM stated that the EFL is coming under criticism from fans and needs to take affirmative action with fans groups playing a role.

SH agreed that the season had been challenging with regard to a number of ownership issues at clubs. Likewise pitch invasions preventing the completion of fixtures, as has occurred at Blackpool and Leyton Orient in recent seasons, can in no way become the norm.

SH stated that club relations are an ongoing issue for the Executive to consider but ultimately it can only be guided by and answerable to the will of the clubs. Clubs will need to be at the forefront of any solution and approve any regulation changes in this area.

SH acknowledged the FSF’s suggestion and stated the issue of club ownership would be discussed by the EFL Board and clubs at their summer conference in June¹.

SH added that the majority of EFL clubs are run very well but acknowledged that the collective may look at changes that help to protect clubs further.

Roger Titford (RT) questioned whether there is a metric for measuring displeasure amongst fans around this issue. SH replied that reputational damage is the primary measure.

¹ Further to this meeting, Club ownership was subsequently discussed at the EFL’s June AGM. It was agreed that further consultation would take place with Clubs during the 2017/18 campaign to have a detailed look at the current provisions in the regulations and whether they remain appropriate both prior to a purchase and once an owner is in control. Member Clubs will be allowed the opportunity to consider if any additional measures should be put in place.

In addition, Clubs voted through a number of amendments to the current Owners’ and Directors’ Test regulations at the AGM that:

- Ensure that any applicant under the Test becomes bound by the Regulations upon completion of a declaration;
- Clarify that provision of false information in a declaration can of itself constitute a Disqualifying Condition under the Test;
- Extend the Disqualifying Condition concerning the commission of a criminal offence within this country to anyone who has engaged in similar conduct overseas, whether or not it has resulted in a conviction.



SH indicated that no options are off the table but a mandate from clubs needs to be obtained and input from all stakeholders will be considered.

SH indicated that the EFL would consider SD's forthcoming policy paper proposals in this area but asked AB to consider numerous models of good governance and ownership at clubs alongside those considered to be flawed.

FSF agreed they would wait until further announcements had been made post EFL AGM.

4 - Judgement Day 3

JN highlighted the EFL's concern regarding the reports of incidents of serious disorder at "Judgement Day 3", the supporter protest held at Blackpool v Leyton Orient. This included the throwing of missiles and pyrotechnics and repeated attempts by some individuals to gain unauthorised access to the stadium. As a result, a stadium lockdown was instigated 10 minutes before the scheduled kick-off.

While the EFL recognises that the right to protest is an important part of a healthy democratic society, it has to be conducted in peaceful fashion and not threaten the playing of matches. The EFL was also concerned at the FSF's role in organising the event and questioned whether it was consistent with the "spirit of engagement" entered into via these supporter engagement sessions.

KM responded by saying the event was largely organised by Blackpool Supporters Trust and the FSF were proud to support it. The protest in their eyes was overwhelmingly positive and peacefully supported in the main apart from a few incidents.

That said, the FSF in no way condoned any acts or criminality. If specific areas for improvement are identified, KM stated that the FSF are happy to engage and listen.

SH stated that the incident created significant issues for the EFL and the competition and would address these issues with the relevant authorities.

5 – Supporter Engagement

JN confirmed that the EFL will be reporting back to the Minister on club engagement with fans as requested.

KM shared some feedback from an FSF survey on supporter engagement sessions which 40% felt they were being better engaged, 40% said there had been no change and 20% said engagement was worse.

The FSF suggested that the EFL could ask clubs the same questions that it would be asking its members about the sessions in order to provide a means for comparison. The EFL asked the FSF to supply details of its survey.

SD and FSF agreed they will seek feedback from members on meetings that have been held with clubs to date. Michael Brunskill to collate and feedback to the EFL.



Fan Forums

MR presented details of the four EFL fan forums which were held in four different locations across the country.

Fan representatives offered suggestions for improvements including making the sessions more interactive, inviting greater numbers to attend and keep them more informal.

6 – EFL AGM Proposals

JN went through items on April's EGM and the upcoming EFL AGM agenda in June which covered:

- Increase in Home Grown Players and introduction of Club Developed Players in 2018/19
- Goal Line Technology in the Championship
- FA Governance Reforms
- The Owner's and Directors' Test
- Conduct of Clubs
- Local promotions
- National League Play-Offs

Billy Grant made some general representations on ticket prices including the suggestion of publishing ticket prices for all matches at the beginning of the season. The EFL's view was that in general, ticket pricing remains a matter for individual clubs².

7 – Away Fans

Andy Pomfret presented details of the EFL's Away Fans experience programme as per below.

Launched in 2016/17, the Away Fan Experience Project is the result of several years of club and supporter research and sees all 72 EFL Clubs receive an assessment via a single mystery matchday visit by a pair of experienced away supporters.

The Away Fan Experience Project has built on the learning from the EFL's fan engagement work (Family Excellence Awards, Core Fans, Disabled Fans) to identify and reward those Clubs who are consistently providing excellent experiences for away fans, to ultimately assist clubs in growing away fan attendances.

The visits took place throughout the 2016/17 season with fans assessing clubs across four main touchpoints - Planning & Travel, Arrival & Welcome, Refreshments and Inside the Stadium - providing a final assessment to determine their likelihood of returning and recommending that club to other away fans. The supporters' feedback offered clubs a unique insight into the quality of experience supporters have when visiting their stadiums.

Kevin Miles asked if the project was continuing in 2017/18 and AP confirmed that it would be.

² Further to this meeting, it should be noted that all of the proposals listed were passed and approved by EFL Clubs at the June AGM.



8 – Safe Standing

The issue is progressing and the issue remains of significant importance to both the EFL and the FSF. Both bodies will continue to work collaboratively to achieve a successful outcome.

9 - AOB

Roger Titford of Reading stated that moving LEDs are impeding his ability to view the ball at times.

Requested to feed this back to the EFL commercial team.